



Press Release

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VERMONT RANKS 2ND IN NATION FOR ACCESS TO STATE PRE-K *However, Program Quality Standards Remain Low*

Washington, D.C. — State funded preschool education, hard hit by the Great Recession, has turned the corner and in many states is back on an expansion track according to the national survey of the states done annually by the nonpartisan National Institute for Early Education Research (NIEER) at Rutgers University. For the second year in a row, NIEER's data show that, nationally speaking, the states have increased funding for pre-K.

Adjusted for inflation, state funding for pre-K increased by nearly \$120 million in 2013-2014 across all 50 states and Washington, DC. Enrollment growth also resumed, albeit modestly, with a total increase of 8,335 slots to reach its highest level recorded over the report's 12-year history. And program quality standards increased as an unprecedented seven states gained ground on NIEER's 10 benchmarks for quality standards.

Vermont continues to offer essentially universal access, ranking 2nd nationally for serving 91 percent of its 4-year-olds, as well as ranking second only to the District of Columbia for 3-year-old access. The state ranks 20th for state spending per child, improving its ranking and spending an additional \$460 per child. Services are offered through two funding streams—the school funding formula and grants to serve at-risk preschoolers—both of which meet only 4 of NIEER's quality standards.

“Vermont has come a long way in providing access to state pre-K and we encourage the state to focus on improving quality in all settings,” said NIEER director Steve Barnett. In 2014, Vermont was awarded a competitive federal Preschool Development Grant for \$7.2 million. In 2015 every school district will be required to provide 10 hours of high quality free pre-K each week. One third of Vermont supervisory unions will be implementing universal preschool in the fall.

Governor Shumlin explained: “Let's not forget the reasons we are striving every day to improve our education system. It is the right thing to do for our kids. It also prepares them for good jobs, drives economic development, and attracts families to our state, which desperately needs young workers. We have had many successes. I am proud that along with crafting an Early Childhood Action Plan and helping to pass Universal Pre-K for all 3- and 4-year olds, my administration secured two highly competitive early childhood grants, attracting \$70 million dollars in federal funds to help give our youngest Vermonters a strong start.”

“It is heartening to see state-funded pre-K, once the fastest growing area in the entire education sector, back on the road to recovery,” said Barnett, “but given that the states cut half a billion dollars in funding in 2011-2012 and a number of states have yet to address those cuts, much work remains to be done.”

Joined at the press conference by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan, Barnett called on all levels of government to dedicate additional resources to preschool education in order to bridge the gap. “Unfortunately, the effects of the recession landed hardest on preschool-age children and our future prosperity depends on their future productivity,” he said.

Barnett said that in addition to adequate funding, state pre-K should have adequate quality and serve all children under 200 percent of poverty. Bold leaders from both major parties are moving some cities and states dramatically ahead, but far too many states have yet to follow. As some cities move to provide preschool for all, most recently New York and Seattle, other areas of their states are left behind. At the same time, quality preschool is becoming a right for every child in some states; other states offer their children no pre-K at all.

The National Institute for Early Education Research (www.nieer.org) at the Graduate School of Education, Rutgers University, New Brunswick, NJ, supports early childhood education policy and practice through independent, objective research.